

# After the Fire

A guide to assist citizens that have had a fire in their home or buildings

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## Part I

### Post-fire Action Tips

Whether you own or rent your home, the first thing to do is to protect yourself from additional losses. If your home is unlivable after the fire, it is important to:

1. Remove all valuables and salvageable items to protect them from further damage
2. Check with utility companies to make sure all utilities are shut off
3. If you are insured, immediately contact your insurance company for detailed instructions on protecting your property, conducting inventory and contacting fire damage restoration companies. If you are not insured, try contacting private organizations for aid and assistance.
4. Board up any broken windows and all doors (If you own the residence, you could be held liable for any injuries resulting from broken glass or unsafe conditions on your property) If you are renting, the landlord may take care of this for you.
5. If you are not insured or only partially insured, you may be able to deduct certain losses from your Federal Income Tax. Call the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040 for more information. If you need forms, the address for the IRS in the El Paso area is 700 East San Antonio St., El Paso, TX 79901
6. Notify the Post Office of your temporary or permanent address change. If you plan to move, but do not know the new address, the Post Office can hold your mail for you or have it forwarded to a relative or neighbor

If you have moved you should:

1. Change your Driver's license and Voter's Registration
  2. Stop deliveries of paper, milk, etc.
  3. Notify the Post Office, children's school, credit card companies, bank, phone company, utilities, doctors, dentists, etc. giving them your new address. Remember to update your address for subscriptions.
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# Replacing Valuable Documents

**Birth and Death Certificates:** Obtain birth and death certificate application forms and instructions through your El Paso County Clerks Office, 500 E. San Antonio, 79901. Phone 546-2071

**Drivers License:** In El Paso, call 855-2132 to locate the nearest Department of Public Safety Office or go by on of the following offices:

- 7300 Gateway Blvd East Phone 598-3487
- 4505 Hondo Pass Ave. Phone 751-6455
- 11612 Scott Simpson Dr. Phone 855-2132
- 1035 Belvidere St. Phone 581-7089

**Social Security and Medicare Cards:** Call the Social Security Administration Office for information at 1-800-772-1213, or go by one of the local offices:

- 1414 Geronimo Phone 540-7493
- 700 E. San Antonio Phone 540-7493

**Marriage Certificates:** Contact the El Paso County Clerks Office, 500 E. San Antonio, 79901 Phone 546-2071

**Deed:** Deeds to your home can be replaced by the El Paso County Clerks Office, 500 E. San Antonio, 79901

**Discharge Papers:** Contact any Veterans Affairs office or call toll free for information 1-800-827-1000

**Citizenship Papers:** Call or contact the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1545 Hawkins, 79925 Phone 540-1806

**Checking and Savings Accounts:** Contact your bank or credit union to report any loss. It may be wise to close out old accounts and switch funds to new accounts.

**Credit Cards:** Contact the company or department store IMMEDIATELY! It may be a good idea to close out the old account, transferring the balance to a new account number

**Currency:** Contact your local bank or Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, El Paso Branch, 301 E. Main St. 79901 Phone 544-4730

**Savings Bonds:** Obtain form PD1048 from your bank, fill it out, obtain all required signatures and mail to the US Treasury, Bureau of Public Debt, Savings Bond Operations, Box 1328, Parkersburg, WV, 26106-1328. For more information call the Kansas City Federal Reserve at 1-800-333-2919

**Voter Registration:** Contact the County Election Department, 500 E. San Antonio, Rm #402, 79901. Phone 546-2154

**Passports:** Contact either the main US Post Office, 8401 Boeing Dr. 79925 Phone 780-7568 or one of the following locations:

- 7383 Remcon Circle phone 584-3362
- 3100 Yarbrough phone 598-2295
- 4116 Dyer phone 565-6589

## After the fire Part II

### Care for Household Items

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#### Floors

**Wood:** Wood floors expand if exposed to water for very long. If floors are buckling, take up the trim board and remove one board along each edge of the floor. When wood dries, it will shrink back to normal size.

**Linoleum:** Water underneath linoleum causes odors and warps the wood underneath. If this happens, remove linoleum carefully. Brittle linoleum can be softened by using a heat lamp. You can then roll up and remove it. It can be re-cemented after the floor dries if it is still in good condition. A new felt liner will be needed. Small blisters in linoleum can be punctured with a nail. Re-cement covering by waiting until the floor is completely dry; dilute regular linoleum paste

until thin enough to go through nail holes; weigh down the linoleum with bricks and boards until the paste dries.

**Rugs:** Dry thoroughly. Clean by sweeping, beating, or vacuuming. Shampoo with commercial rug shampoo or 2 TBSP. dish detergent and 1 cup of water, using a soft brush in a circular motion. Dry quickly, yet well. The remaining excess moisture at the base of tufts may rot the rug, causing it to fall apart. Lay rugs flat and expose them to warm, dry air. A fan will speed up the drying process.

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## **Walls and Ceilings**

**Painted Walls:** Walls can be washed while still wet. Use a mild soap/detergent or Smoke-Odor formula and wash one small area at a time, working from the floor up. Rinse immediately with clear water.

**Ceilings:** Ceilings should be washed last.

Do not re-paint until everything is thoroughly dry. If there is substantial damage, then a primer coat is necessary. (Vinyl primers work best).

**Plaster or Stucco Walls:** Consult your local paint store on how to repair plaster and stucco walls.

**Wallpapered walls:** Re-paste loosened wallpaper with commercially prepared paste. Wash with a very mild liquid detergent and soft sponge, rinse quickly to prevent paper from becoming soaked. Work from the bottom to top to prevent streaking.

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## **Furniture**

If your insurance covers fire- or water-damaged furniture, it may be better to apply allowances on new items. If you plan to repair instead, consider the cost of glue, clamps, and finishing.

**Wood furniture:** To repair water-soaked furniture, put it outside. Remove drawers and allow them to dry separately. Clean off soot and dirt, using a hose if necessary. Wash with mild soap suds or Smoke-Odor formula. Wipe dry and bring inside. Sun will warp and twist furniture.

To remove white spots or cloudiness that may develop, rub the surface with a cloth wrung out with a solution of 1/2 cup household ammonia and 1/2 cup water. Wipe dry and polish with wax. Rub surface with equal parts of turpentine and linseed oil with 4-0 steel wool pad dipped in liquid polishing wax. Wipe with soft cloth and buff. For small area of white spots, use camphorated oil or oil of peppermint, then buff.

**Upholstered:** Dry furniture as quickly as possible to prevent mildew and rot. Brush off dirt and if necessary, shampoo with a solution of 1/4 cup powdered detergent in 1 quart hot water. Apply suds only with a sponge or damp cloth; blot dry. Brush pile in one direction only. Once dry, brush or vacuum.

**Leather:** To remove surface dirt, wash with cold water and wipe dry. Dry at room temperature AWAY FROM SUN AND HEAT. When dry, clean with saddle soap, paste-type neutral wax, or other commercial finish wax.

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## **Clothing**

Wash all washable clothing (except fabric which cannot be bleached) in Smoke-Odor formula and dry well. All other items should be taken to a cleaners as soon as possible. Remove all trim and shoulder pads that might bleed through fabric. To remove mildew, wash fresh stains with soap and water, then rinse and dry in sun. If the stain remains, use a solution of lemon juice, salt, 1 tablespoon of perborate bleach and a pint of lukewarm water, or diluted solution of household chlorine bleach. Test colored garments before using any treatment.

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## **Mattresses, Blankets, and Pillows**

**Mattresses:** Good ones can probably be reconditioned by reputable mattress-building company. It is too difficult to do at home. To dry them, set them in sunlight until dry, then cover with rubber or plastic sheeting. If they have just been exposed to light smoke, airing them out will probably be sufficient.

**Blankets and Pillows:** Shake and brush surface dirt from blankets. If possible, use the manufacturer's washing instructions. Otherwise, soak for 15 minutes in lukewarm water and detergent suds. Turn two or three times by hand. Spin off water and repeat if necessary. Rinse two or three times in lukewarm water. Let dry in a preheated dryer with some hot bath towels, or hang it outside to dry. When dry, gently stretch the blanket back into shape and brush it. Finish by ironing trim. It is almost impossible to get smoke out of pillows. Both foam and feathers retain the odor.

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## **Food and Medicine**

### **Salvaging Food**

**Canned:** Wash cans and glass jars with household detergent; rinse in clear water. Do not use any canned goods with bulges, dents, or rust spots or which have been exposed to excessive heat as it may have melted the solder in the can.

**Frozen:** FRUITS can be refrozen if they still taste and smell good. If beginning to ferment, they can be eaten but they will have an "off" flavor. VEGETABLES cannot be refrozen if completely thawed. Refreeze only if some ice crystals remain. If vegetables have been thawed and cannot be reused or if color or texture is drastically altered due to partial thawing of contents, discard them. If you question their quality, THROW THEM OUT! Spoilage occurs before a bad odor is noticed. MEAT, POULTRY, AND FISH can be refrozen if ice crystals remain. They must be cooked thoroughly before eating. Any bad odors or doubts about quality, THROW THEM OUT! Bacteria multiply rapidly.

**Medication:** If any prescription or over-the-counter medication has been exposed to heat or smoke, check with your doctor or pharmacist before using. Heat and smoke can effect the chemical make-up of some medications.

**Cooking utensils:** Wash thoroughly with soap and water, polish with cleaner. Copper and brass may be polished with a special polish, or use salt sprinkled on a lemon, or use a cloth saturated with vinegar.\

**Appliances:** Do not run electrical appliances that have gotten wet until they are checked by a repairman. Using appliances before they are thoroughly clean and dry can cause more damage.

Dry out electric range by removing back panel and placing a fan close by to blow air. A gas range needs the attention of your local utility company.

Do not operate washers, refrigerators, or other large appliances until they have been checked by a serviceman.

If you freezer stops running, keep it closed. Food will usually stay frozen for a day, maybe two or three. To move food to another freezer, wrap it in lots of newspapers an blankets, then transport. To remove odor from appliances, wash the inside with baking soda/water solution, baking soda/vinegar solution or household ammonia/water solution.

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## **Books**

To dry books, place them on end with pages separated. After a while they should be piled and pressed to keep pages from crinkling. To prevent mildew, continue this alternate drying/pressing method until materials are thoroughly dry.

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## **Locks and Hinges**

Take apart and wipe with kerosene and oil. If they cannot be removed, squirt with machine oil through bolt or keyhole and turn knob to distribute oil.

# After the fire Part III

## Utilities Restoration

Often, the fire department must disconnect your utilities as a safety precaution. The utility companies cannot always restore your utilities until repairs are approved and clearance is issued by Building Services, #2 Civic Center Plaza  
Phone 541-4560

When contacting Building Services it will be necessary to explain your circumstances and arrange for the inspection of electrical, plumbing, or gas utilities.

If insured, contact your insurance company. They may be able to recommend or hire a contractor to assist with utility restoration.

***Do not attempt to reconnect the utilities yourself***

For more information on restoring utilities or in the case of an emergency you can contact the following:

- El Paso Electric Company, 123 Mills St. Phone 543-5970
- El Paso Natural Gas, 4700 Pollard Phone 544-6300
- El Paso Water Utility, 1154 Hawkins Phone 594-5500

# After the Fire - Part IV

## A Word About Fire Department Operations

**Why are windows broken and/or holes cut in the roof?**

As fire burns, it moves upward then outward. Breaking windows and/or cutting holes in the roof (called ventilation) stops that damaging outward movement and enables firefighters to fight the fire more efficiently, resulting in less damage to the structure in the long run.



**Why are holes cut in walls?**

This is done so the Fire Department is absolutely sure that the fire is completely out, and that there is no fire inside the walls or other hidden places.

**Is it possible to obtain a copy of the fire report?**

In El Paso a fire incident report is a public document and is available at Fire Department Administrative Offices at 8600 Montana Ave. Phone 771-1000  
You will need the Date of the fire, the Address of the fire, and the Incident Number.